

Finding Families for Teens

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Finding Families for Teens

Agenda

- ❑ Brief Orientation
- ❑ Introductions
- ❑ Sharing Strategies & Lessons Learned:
 1. Preparing and working with teens
 2. Recruiting with and for teens
- ❑ Q & A



Panel Participants today are:

Jackie, 17
Chaney, 23

Your presenters are:

Nancy Carter, SaySo
Tamika Williams, NC DSS
Mellicent Blythe, UNC



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Goal for Webinars

Grow your ability to **recruit** and **retain** families for the children in foster care by providing:

1. Practice suggestions, examples, and information
2. Perspectives of key stakeholders
3. An interactive forum for professional support, collaboration, and problem-solving

Working with and Recruiting for Teens



Tamika Williams
NC Division of Social Services

Permanence Is . . .

- More than a legal goal, permanence is:
 - Stability
 - Continuity of relationships
- It incorporates:
 1. Sense of **belonging**
 2. **Cultural connectedness** between the youth's background and permanent home
 3. **Social connections** between the youth's background and permanent home



Aging Out Without Permanency Means . . .

- **No one**, beyond professionals, to support and mentor them
- The community has failed to meet the youth's most **immediate** need
- Youth must **fend for themselves**
 - While continuing to have emotional, psychological, mental health, medical, educational, and developmental needs



Youth Who Age Out of Foster Care

- One in four will be incarcerated within two years
- Over one-fifth will become homeless at some time
- Lower educational attainment
 - 58% had a high school degree at age 19, vs. 87% of non-foster youth
 - Less than 3% had college degrees by age 25, vs. 28% for the general population



Source: Casey report, *Time for Reform: Aging out of Foster Care and On their Own*

Acknowledge . . .

- Foster care is a different life experience
 - Common situations and things can be rarities for youth in care
- Youth can be loyal, love their biological families, and develop caring relationships with other parental adults
- Differences can create **opportunity**

Strategies for Engaging Youth

- Be mindful of developmental stage
- Allow the child to take the lead
- Work at their convenience and on their turf
- Encourage caregiver involvement
- Help youth meet others currently or formerly in foster care
 - Or show videos with youth discussing their experiences in care

More Strategies for Engaging Youth

- Keep a sense of humor
- Be flexible
- Respect individuality
- Remember the unique cultural aspects of adolescence
- Develop a language that is relaxed, engaging, and not too formal
- Building a genuine rapport takes time



Actions that Help

1. Stay open to possibilities
2. Speak respectfully and positively about birth parents
3. Integrate the youth voice
4. See the family as the best resource
5. Assume connections exist even though they may be strained
6. Develop foster parents
7. Ensure CFT members understand youth isolation
8. Ask non-professional supports important to the youth to participate in CFTs
9. Make recruitment and development of permanency options part of your CFTs
10. Work with child-placing agencies

Recruitment for Teens: Lessons Learned

#1 Don't give up!

- You CAN find families for teens: it's NEVER too late!
- To convince youth and families, you must believe this yourself



Recruitment for Teens: Lessons Learned

#2 Think strategically

about how to recruit for teens – and how to involve teens



Recruitment Strategy	Ways to Involve Teens
<u>Targeted recruitment</u> of groups likely to consider teens	Participating in recruitment events
<u>Child-specific recruitment</u> for a particular youth	Identifying kin supports
<u>Training/development</u> of foster/adoptive parents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Build competencies ■ Decrease anxiety 	Providing encouragement to consider teens

Targeted Recruitment

Giving Teens a Voice

Use your microphone or the chat box

- What groups in your community might be open to fostering teens?
- What information or message do you think they need?
- How can teens play a part?



Child-Specific Recruitment

Giving Teens Control

Use your microphone or the chat box

- How can social workers identify potential caregivers for teens?
- How else can teens have a say in their own recruitment efforts?
- How can we help prepare teens for permanency?



Training/Development of Foster Parents

Listening to Teens

Use your microphone or the chat box



- What competencies are needed to parent teens?
- What myths/worries might people have about teens?
- How can teens help address these?

Before moving on...
Any questions?



Moving Forward: Learning from Youths and Caregivers



Nancy Carter
SaySo, Inc.
Independent Living Resources, Inc.

SaySo: Strong Able Youth Speaking Out



- Est. 1998
- Nonprofit corporation run by youths
- Adult Advisors have no voting powers
- Elected board of youths ages 14 – 24
- Mission: to support, educate, and speak out to improve the substitute care system

Independent Living Resources, Inc.



- Est. 1987 to help programs prepare youths for life after foster care
- Developed into a publishing company to help bring resources to professionals
- Provides consulting and training to the LINKS program and nationally

Learning from Foster and Adoptive Parents of Teens...



Why are people reluctant to foster/adopt teens?

- Bad press (rumors, myths)
- Doubt they can make a difference
- Lack of support/collaboration
- Money issues



How can DSS agencies recruit and encourage more families to foster or adopt teens?

1. Training
 - In-depth, specific to managing behaviors
 - Use successful foster parents and teens
 - Joint training with social workers
2. Support
 - Respect foster parents and the rules in the home
 - Monthly group meetings for the families
 - More immediate support for the parents in times of crisis
 - Be responsible for damage caused by teens

The "support system" sells the job!

How can DSS agencies recruit and encourage more families to foster or adopt teens?

- 3. Recruitment strategies
 - Show successful teens on billboards and have them speak at recruitment events and trainings. (Use SAYSO!)
 - Highlight what your agency does to support and retain foster and adoptive families.
 - Stay away from advertising "caring for the young children."
 - Highlight the BENEFITS of fostering teens

For you and your family, what are some of the benefits of caring for a teen?

- Making a difference/Changing a life

The greatest benefit to me is getting that call a year or two down the road after a teen has left my house. They would say "I appreciate everything you have taught me."

If it was not for you I would not have made it this far in life."



For you and your family, what are some of the benefits of caring for a teen?

- Becoming Family

I have grandchildren from the adults who once lived in my home. We share what life was like for them. I can see them parenting their children the way I parented them.

There is an attachment between us like no other.



For you and your family, what are some of the benefits of caring for a teen?

- Having fun!
- Greater independence & maturity of teens



Other Questions?



What's Next for You and Your Agency?



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http://uncodum.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_ONDAA_dNnfPjKqjq&SVID=Prod

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Link for sign-in certificate for your training records:

https://www.ncswlearn.org/webinar/pdf/certificate_03-19-09.pdf



Since youth tend to think adults are out of touch

Ask Questions Such As...

1. What does family look like to you? Who are important members in your family?
2. If you could live with anyone, who would that be? (Think grand and more realistic)
3. Who would you like to be present at your graduation?
4. Who would you like to call you on your birthday?
5. Who would you ideally like to be with on Christmas and/or holidays? What have those days been like?
6. Where do you feel most at ease? How long have you felt this to be true?
7. Who will help you learn to drive, look for a job, and is available if you need to talk?
8. Are you agreeable to us working toward any of these things?
9. Name the five most memorable people in your life.
10. What do you most want to understand about your life?
11. What would you want others to understand about you?
12. What is permanence/stability to you?

Targeted Recruitment

Targeted recruitment focuses your efforts on specific families or communities who are best matched to care for the specific children and youth in need of homes. Developing a targeted recruitment plan fulfills your agency's MEPA requirement; it also encourages you to focus resources and efforts in areas that are most likely to yield results. As explained below, there are three crucial steps to success in targeted recruitment.

How to Do Targeted Recruitment

STEP 1: Describe the children in care

Develop a profile of the children in care in your agency: how many are there in total? How many are in each category when broken down by age group, ethnicity, and special needs (sibling group, medical, educational, or emotional needs, etc.)?

STEP 2: Describe the homes currently available to them

Develop a profile of the foster homes and beds: how many are there in total? How many are in each category when broken down by ages of children accepted in the home, ethnicity, and willingness to care for special needs?

STEP 3: Make a plan to fill the gap

Identify and reach out to families who can care for the children most in need of homes.

Examples of Targeted Recruitment for Teenagers

1. Develop current resource parents:
 - a. Have licensed families provide respite or mentoring for teens in care so they can develop relationships with them
 - b. Have teens and their resource parents speak to MAPP/GPS classes and participate in activities and events for resource families
 - c. Provide or refer families to training that prepare them for parenting teens, such as managing common teen behaviors and adolescent development
2. Target community groups that have experience with teens, including:
 - a. High School groups: PTAs, athletic events, teachers associations, etc.
 - b. Community groups: Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts, church youth groups, teen community service organizations
 - c. Professionals: group home staff, mental health associations, etc.
 - d. Senior groups: civic and church organizations that have high numbers of empty-nesters or retirees
3. Ask teens:
 - a. Have ongoing discussions with teens individually and in groups about permanency: a goal of long-term support, stability, and a "home base" for every youth
 - b. Ask teens to talk and write about related questions, such as: Who do you consider family? What does family look like? What would you look for in a family? What would you bring to a family? How can you combine birth and adoptive family connections in your life? What do other teens in foster care need from foster families?

Child-Specific Recruitment

Child-specific recruitment “means developing an individualized plan for a particular child based on the child’s background” (Goodman, 1999). It is often used for children that can be more difficult to place through traditional recruitment techniques, such as older children or those who are medically fragile. To the greatest possible extent, the youth should play a central role in deciding on the recruitment materials, methods, and targets.

Three Types

1. **Child-Specific Publicity:** Agencies provide to the public a photo and written profile of a child free for adoption. NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network can provide assistance to agencies on writing profiles. “Child-specific publicity has two goals. First...it stimulates prospective parents’ interest in a child and results in adoption. Second—and more commonly—it builds public awareness about the need for parents and generates resources for other children in the system” (Zemler, 2000). Following are some common venues for child-specific publicity:
 - Photolisting Book of Waiting Children.
 - Internet Listings
 - Print and Television Campaigns such as “Wednesday’s Child.”
 - Heart Galleries
 - Adoption Parties/Matching Events
2. **Child-Centered Recruitment:** Youth take a leading role in deciding how to describe their strengths, needs, and interests, and in designing recruitment materials. This process often helps teens in resolving concerns about adoption and preparing them to accept new permanency goals.
3. **Identifying Potential Caregivers from a Child’s Life**
 - a. Children and teens are asked specifically and repeatedly about important people in their lives, even before they come into care. As the Casey Breakthrough Series Collaborative (Casey Family Programs, 2005) recommends, “**Ask early and ask often.**”
 - b. **Case records** are reviewed in detail to identify significant support people in the child’s or birth family’s history.
 - c. Every **Child and Family Team Meeting** is an opportunity to identify, engage, and support potential caregivers for a child. Be sure to include professionals from other systems who are working with the child or family, such as schools, mental health providers, or juvenile courts. They may know of additional support people to bring into the planning.

Sources: Casey Family Programs, 2003; Zemler, 2000

In Their Own Words

Excerpts from a Foster Parent Survey Conducted January-February 2009

Why are people reluctant to foster or adopt teens?

- **Bad press:** "...the negative rumors and gossip shared about some behaviors some teenagers may display."
- **Doubt they can make a difference:** "Some parents feel it is too late to make a difference in a teen's life. They feel inadequate. Most foster parents are not properly trained to deal with teens and their issues"
- **Lack of support/collaboration:**
 - "The social worker, therapist, caregiver, etc. often do not work together for the placement to work."
 - "Social workers often do not share vital information with the caregiver prior to placement."
- **Money issues:** "Agencies do not provide enough help in clothing and extra activities expenses. In reality, while the board payment helps, there's not enough to pay for the problems that someone must deal with 24/7 day after day and month after month. The ones who survive must do this for love."

How can DSS agencies recruit and encourage more families to foster or adopt teens?

1. Training

- **Make it in-depth and hands-on.** "I often asked my agency representative for strategies to help me work with lying, stealing, defiance, and disruptive behaviors. They had no concrete suggestions. Often, what they suggested I had tried and did not work."
- **Partner with teens and successful foster parents.** "Someone who has 'been there, done that' can tell them what it's really like. It could help them see the joys of working with teens - and there are many!"
- **Train social workers and foster parents together.** "DSS teen social workers and teen foster parents should have mandatory joint in-service training that will enable them to get to know one another, better support each other and foster improved team work."
- **All foster parents should have the LINKS training.**

2. Support

- "Respect foster parents and the rules in the home....Often foster parents feel social workers don't understand what it is like to live full time with teens who are in foster care."
- "Monthly group meetings for the families"
- "More immediate support for the parents in times of crisis."

- “Be responsible for damage caused by teens” or “help the teens understand that they will be personally responsible for any damage they do.”

3. Recruitment ideas

- “In recruiting, highlight what your agency does to support and retain foster and adoptive families. The ‘support system’ sells the job!”
- “Stay away from advertising ‘caring for the young children.’”
- “Show successful teens on billboards and have them speak at recruitment sessions, foster parent training, churches, etc. SAYSO is an excellent resource for this.”

For you and your family, what are some of the benefits of caring for a teen?

- **Making a difference/Changing a life**

“The best benefit is when they start to realize you are really there for them, you see the teen blossom and grow into a really wonderful young adult and they show their appreciation by being a real family member!”

“Giving them the life skills it takes to become successful in life and watching that journey unfold with victories and failures.”

“The greatest benefit to me is getting that call a year or two down the road after a teen has left my house. They would say ‘I appreciate everything you have taught me. If it was not for you I would not have made it this far in life.’”

“We worked with parenting and pregnant teens. I really enjoyed guiding these girls and helping them be great moms in hopes of breaking the cycle of abuse and neglect. For those who decide not to keep their babies, I enjoy walking them through the steps of adoption and finding good families for their babies and giving them hope for a new life (second chance) for themselves.”

“I have been blessed in hearing what I did ‘right’ in caring for them. I know my mistakes. Teens are so forgiving when you are honest with them. And they learn to forgive by how the adults forgave them.”

“It has been a joy to see how some of them have blossomed into assertive, thoughtful, and considerate people from being quite, distrustful and sad children upon arrival.”

“Once they have learned to trust and open up to me, they have taught me just how much stronger some young people can be and how learning is always a two-way street.”

- **Becoming family**

“While caring for a teen is challenging, it has its rewards. When you earn their trust, they love. When they love you, that love is real. They will work hard to please you.”

“I have grandchildren from the adults who once lived in my home. We share what life was like for them. I can see them parenting their children the way I parented them. There is an attachment between us like no other.”

“We had a girl for 4 years. I did not hear from her for 10 years, then she looked me up specifically because she was pregnant and did not plan on keeping the baby. This beautiful special needs baby boy is now my happy, adjusted 11-year-old adopted son.”

"Everyone has had to learn to share and understand others and those are lessons we all need in life. In doing this, we've learned the true meaning of 'family.'"

"Our lives are richer! The teens are now adults and they are a part of our family. Even in foster care connections can continue."

- **Having fun!**

"Getting to do the youthful fun things with them and their friends."

"We enjoy the conversation and dialogue from having a teen in our home."

- **Greater independence**

"Teens are independent people that do not require a lot of care like a younger child. They are able to take care of their own personal needs."

- **Greater understanding and maturity**

"Most often, they are better at taking direction and redirection and are able to understand the reasons given for instructions."

"Teens are better at expressing their thoughts and needs, which makes it easier to determine what directions to take in assisting the teen meet his/her goal."

Is there anything else you would like to say to DSS agencies about recruiting and retaining foster and adoptive parents for teenagers?

- **Be open and honest.**

"Give them all of the facts: the good, the bad, and the ugly. Promote the teen's strengths but don't shy away from exposing their needs."

"Be honest about the challenges these foster parents may face. If they are prepared they will better equipped to deal with the issues these children may face."

- **Provide foster parent mentors/connections.**

"In my "ideal world" each new foster parent would be paired with someone with experience to contact as needed to brainstorm, commiserate, or receive advice."

"One of the scariest things about fostering is not being able to relate to what is happening with the teen and to know what to say and do for them - or not to do. There's no book that tells you what to say when the teen tells you about being raped, or taught to lie, cheat and steal to survive. DSS workers keep office hours, but that never seems to be when you need someone to call for advice. Getting support from someone with experience could smooth the path for a new foster parent and might help to prevent disruptions."

- **Be open to foster parents with different lifestyles.**

- **Listen/respect their experience.**

"When a foster parent that is living with a child tells a social worker things about this child that needs attention, they need to really listen. Especially social workers who have never had children and try to tell a foster parent that has taken in over 20 children how they are wrong. College books do not take the place of real life practice and trials."

Additional Resources

Resources for those working with adolescents in foster care

1. www.casey.org – Tools, publications, assessments, and resources.
2. www.chapinhall.org – Publications on policies and programming related to child welfare. They have many articles on transitioning youth.
3. www.ilrinc.com – Improved web site with products, resources, links, curriculum, ideas, current news, blogs and networking related to transitioning youths.
4. **On Your Way** – Free web site for youths to help put the pieces of their lives together and create future educational/career goals and a permanent, secure profile. www.onyourway.org
5. **On Their Way** – For caregivers to help promote the On Your Way web site and become aware of daily activities they can do to help youths get on their way. http://www.ilrinc.com/products/secure_store_item/on_their_way/
6. www.saysoinc.org – Strong Able Youth Speaking Out. News, events, and resources related to North Carolina's youths who are or have been in care. "For You" guidebook and video created by youths available online.
7. www.fosterclub.org – Site for foster youths, caregivers, and others. A wealth of national information (connected to the National Resource Center data), state information, resources, and discussion boards.
8. **Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youths** – Research compiled on three waves of interviews with youths at ages 17, 19, and 21. This report is used to support many policy and programming ideas within agencies and nationally. http://www.chapinhall.org/article_abstract.aspx?ar=1355
9. **Time for Reform: Aging Out and On Their Own** – Written in partnership with Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. <http://www.kidsarewaiting.org/tools/reports/files/0006.pdf>
10. www.kidsarewaiting.org A web site dedicated to youths aging out of foster care without permanency. Many resources, publications, and reports related to this topic.
11. **Surviving the Storm** – A book written by Julia Charles, one of North Carolina's youths who aged out and was later adopted at 23. She was a Foster Club All Star, SaySo member, and keynote speaker at numerous conferences. Training discussion points for workers, caregivers, and youths at the conclusion of the book. http://www.ilrinc.com/products/secure_store_item/surviving_the_storm/
<http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=4477483n> – brief CBS news story

LINKS resources

1. **Direct PDF to LINKS policy** – describes assessment, policies, and resources for older youths, included information about how NC administers educational resources like ETV and NC Reach. <http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/CSs1201c7.pdf>
2. **LINK Up Calls with State LINKS Coordinator.** Second Friday of each month from 9:30-10:30 AM. Call 919-715-0769 (confirm telephone number via State LINKS Coordinator joan.mcallister@ncmail.net – retires June 30, 2009)
3. **Attend local LINKS meetings facilitated by the State Coordinator and regional LINKS groups.**
4. **LINKS training: Register at www.ncswlearn.org**
 - LINKS 101 – for worker
 - LINKS 201 – for workers (must take LINKS 101 first)
 - Helping Youths Reach Self-Sufficiency (caregivers)
 - Real World Instructional Seminar (learn to coordination a real world community based simulation event)